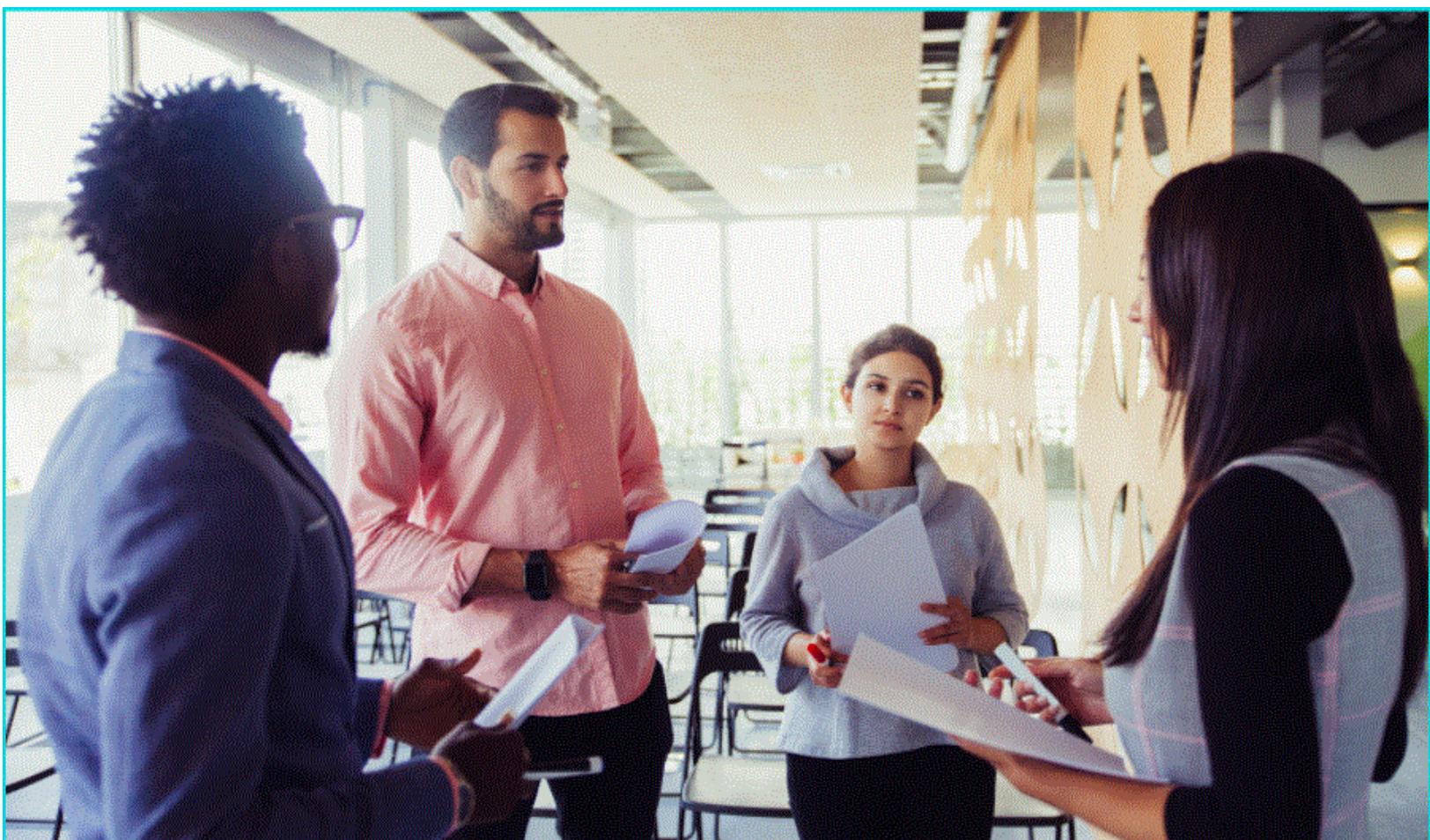


# ETHICAL AND PROFESSIONAL DILEMMAS FOR EDUCATORS

## Module 5 SUPPLEMENTAL SCENARIOS

### *Culturally Responsive Teaching*

### Facilitator's Guide



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# Introduction

*The education profession is vested by the public with a trust and responsibility requiring the highest ideals of professionalism. Therefore, the educator accepts both the public trust and the responsibility to practice the profession according to the highest possible degree of ethical conduct and standards. Such responsibilities include a commitment to the students, the profession, the community, and the family.*

*Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators 2010 Preamble*

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Public school educators are held to high standards of behavior because they are entrusted with the well-being of their students. The public expects that their behavior exemplifies ethical and moral integrity. Teachers serve as role models who should recognize that their conduct, both on and off the job, can profoundly impact their professional image. Lapses in judgment can adversely impact students, damage teachers' credibility, and erode public trust in schools and the profession. Additionally, with advances in technology and greater access to social media, the challenges educators are likely to encounter have increased in recent years. Consequently, educators must develop a keen awareness and sensitivity to a variety of dilemmas and circumstances they may encounter in their daily contact with students, families, and the community. It is vital that educators make conscious ethical decisions to ensure that their professional practice meets the highest possible ethical standards of conduct and responsibility.

The purpose of this publication is to provide a collection of scenarios to help educators become more aware of the ethical dimensions of their profession. These brief scenarios provide educators the opportunity to engage in collegial discussions about situations that could result in career-threatening consequences. Although the descriptions provided are fictional, they are based on actual situations and cases that have led to negative consequences ranging from personal and public embarrassment to license revocation, termination, criminal and civil liability.

**Please note, this activity has not been designed to unduly raise fears or to prescribe a specific moral/ethical code. It is intended to be a resource for educators to help discuss, recognize and analyze situations that could result in public and professional harm. For the purpose of these discussions, “educator” includes superintendents, administrators, teachers, special services professionals, coaches, substitute teachers, and paraprofessionals. Like most ethical challenges, some issues may have simple solutions while others will require educators to employ their best professional judgment.**



# Organization and Format

Educators rarely have the opportunity to openly discuss many of the issues raised in the following scenarios. Consequently, facilitators may observe various levels of discomfort ranging from heightened concern about having any student interaction that could be misinterpreted to personal disagreements about whether or not the examples provided truly represent ethical dilemmas.

All reactions are legitimate. It is the fundamental nature of conversations like these to not only produce some discomfort but also to offer opportunities for discussion, self-reflection, and learning.

Facilitated conversations are meant to raise teachers' level of awareness about responsible, professional behavior. Bringing beginning teachers, their mentors, as well as other staff members together to share perspectives will enhance the conversations and likely result in richer dialogue. Facilitators should establish an understanding with the group that the purpose of these discussions is to recognize that there are professional boundaries. The discussions are **not** meant to suggest that teachers should refrain from building and maintaining meaningful relationships with their students, colleagues, and community to promote school success.

The following scenarios are provided as a way for educators to carefully examine and discuss possible strategies for dealing with ethical dilemmas. Many have been taken from the media here in Connecticut and across the nation. These scenarios present an opportunity for teachers to outline specific issues raised in the scenarios, recognize possible consequences and generate alternative considerations that would result in a more positive outcome.

The scenarios are based on the structure of the *Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers* which should help guide the discussion and analysis of each scenario.

The three new scenarios represent a new category, not previously included - Culturally competent teaching and behavior.

- Dealing justly and fairly with students
- The Importance of Names
- Recognizing and respecting the cultural backgrounds of all students



# Using the Scenarios

There are numerous ways for districts to use these scenarios. You may organize the Facilitated Conversations to best meet the needs of your district. Below is one process that may be used to facilitate the conversations within a two-hour timeframe. Each scenario discussion should take approximately 20 – 30 minutes.

## Sample Facilitated Conversation Process:

- Prior to conducting the facilitated conversations, instruct participants to review the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers. Be sure participants have a copy of the Code.
- Plan in advance which scenarios you will discuss. The legislation mandates that at least one of the scenarios include a situation involving bullying (Category IV). Select at least two to three additional scenarios which are most relevant to your district. Provide each participant with copies of the selected scenarios and corresponding questions from the Participant's Workbook. Create a sign-in sheet to keep for your records.
- Use the PowerPoint provided to set the purpose for the facilitated conversations. You may want to ask participants to review the PowerPoint prior to the scheduled meeting or use it to frame the conversation at the start of the meeting.
- Review the first selected scenario using the guiding questions. Instruct participants to respond to the questions in the order listed as the discussion will build from one question to the next. Participants may work in small groups to develop responses and then share several of their responses with the entire group.
- Use the provided section of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators which relates to the specific scenario to develop a deeper understanding of the educators' responsibility to students, the community, and the profession.
- Close the discussion by summarizing the key points and strategies to effectively handle a similar situation. Use the discussion points provided in the guide to assist you in both small and large group discussions.
- Repeat the process with the remaining scenarios.
- Final Reflection: on page **15** of the **Participant's Workbook**, there are six questions provided that can be used as a final reflection. You may select to have participants respond to one or more of the questions and collect their responses as an exit ticket at the end of the session.
- **Next Steps:** Direct beginning teachers to log in to TEAM and complete the online questions. Once they have completed the online questions, they will have completed the Module 5 requirements for this year.

**Please note: The discussion points provided in the guide are by no means exhaustive and it is not mandatory that all points are discussed. Your participants may raise issues, discuss potential negative consequences and consider alternative actions beyond what is included in the guide.**



# Culturally Competent and Culturally Responsive Teaching Context for Discussing Bias

Often people interpret and react to situations based on assumptions about others. We all hold some form of bias due to socialization and cultural stereotypes that may be positive and manifest as unearned advantages, or negative which manifest as unearned disadvantages.

According to the Ohio State University's Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, implicit bias refers to attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. It is the opposite of explicit bias, which refers to attitudes or beliefs that we fully admit to in our discussions and actions, and intentionally drawn on and act on. Bias--implicit and explicit--leads to unearned advantages and unearned disadvantages, which can produce barriers to student performance, engagement, and behavior. These beliefs and attitudes impact how we relate to students and families. Unchecked, our biases can influence and determine whom we humanize and value. Studies have revealed that bias can impact how teachers view students, perceive their behavior, and respond to student behavior. Biased perceptions of students and their actions result in racial disparities in student discipline, particularly for discretionary, nonviolent school policy offenses. Bias can have a powerfully negative impact on teacher expectations, educational access and opportunities, academic achievement, and discipline referrals.

**Cultural competence** is understanding and having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. Developing cultural competence helps us understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. It supports respectful, trusting relationships.

**Cultural responsiveness** is the purposeful action taken to allow all students to share and take pride in their unique differences. Culturally responsive teaching means that the teacher is invested in and committed to making meaningful connections between what students learn in school and their cultures, languages, and life experiences. To do this requires educators to take the time to learn about each student and family. Authentic, respectful connections between students and help students understand the relevance between what they learn in school and their lives beyond school.

An important part of being culturally responsive is not only the ability to build trusting relationships with all students and their families, but also affirming them and validating their experiences. That means as culturally responsive educators we educate ourselves about all forms of bias – how it operates and what we can do to interrupt it wherever and whenever it manifests. Being culturally responsive encourages students to feel a sense of belonging and helps to create safe spaces where all children feel seen, valued, respected, and heard by teachers with high regard and expectations for them.



In this new section, we will explore several scenarios involving cultural competence and bias. In each situation, the outcome of the incident depends upon the judgment of the teacher which can be influenced by implicit and/or explicit bias. Negative outcomes are often the result of poor judgment on the behalf of teachers.

## CONTEXT FOR SCENARIO 1

These scenarios are intended to offer an opportunity for self-reflection and examination of your own thoughts and beliefs, as you determine what the most appropriate course of action should be. Some of these scenarios may touch on sensitive areas. This is an opportunity to share your thoughts in a respectful and professional manner. We should all be committed to lifelong learning—especially to enhance the learning experiences of our students.

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Mr. G is a 9th-grade math teacher who has a generally good relationship with his students. He runs a tight ship and has a zero-tolerance rule for policy violations. A male student, D came to class wearing a hat. Students are not allowed to wear hats in his class. Mr. G gave him a disapproving look and told him, “Take off the hat!” D just lowered his head and said in a very soft but polite voice, “I don’t want to.” Mr. G responded in a raised voice, “You know what the rule is in this class! Take off that hat!” By now all the students were looking at D to see what was going on. Some boys in the back of the class were whispering and laughing. D was generally a cooperative and respectful student. He again said but in a slightly louder voice, “Mr. G, please, I don’t want to.” Mr. G was now furious and told D if the hat didn’t come off, he was going to the principal’s office. D pleaded with Mr. G, “Please, I don’t want to take off my hat. Can’t I just keep on for today? You let M keep her hat on last week. Mr. G grew angrier and wrote him up for insubordination and sent him to the office.

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### Discussion Questions to Consider

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?
2. Which sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers and/or other school or district policies are applicable to this scenario?
3. In this situation, how might the teacher’s decisions impact the students, families, the teacher, and the school community?
4. What responses/actions would result in a more positive outcome(s) and/or what can the teacher do to rectify this situation?

5. What are some classroom management strategies a teacher could employ to address a situation such as this? How can teachers, maintain appropriate standards of behavior, while being culturally responsive to their individual students?\*

*\*An extra question has been added to this scenario*

**Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators:**  
Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies Section 10-145d-400a

**(b) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT:**

**(1) The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:**

- (A) Recognize, respect and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal justly and considerately with students;
- (C) Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientations.

**(c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION:**

**(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession of teaching, shall:**

- (D) Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.

**UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

**(f) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:**

- (D) Emotionally abuse students.

**Possible Responses to Discussion Questions**

**1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?**

- The hat rule is Mr. G's classroom rule, which he does not enforce fairly or consistently since a female student in the same class was allowed to keep her hat on the week before.
- The fact that D is generally cooperative begs the question, why is he refusing to remove his hat? Mr. G has not asked D why he does not want to remove his hat.
- Mr. G created and escalated the issue. This resulted in lost instructional time for all students, particularly D, and likely damaged any relationship he might have had with D.
- Mr. G may have allowed his emotions and need for control to cause him to take such a stand.
- Besides losing instructional time, Mr. G escalated the issue by engaging in a verbal altercation with D in front of the entire class. This may have embarrassed D in front of his classmates.
- Mr. G didn't recognize, respect and uphold the dignity and worth of D and, deal justly and considerately with him.



- The way a teacher enters the classroom and conducts it establishes a culture and climate that can be humanizing or oppressive for some or all of the students in the class.

Educator and psychologist Haim Ginnott wrote: *“I’ve come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized.”*

2. What sections of the “Code” and/or other school /district policies are applicable to this interaction?

- Mr. G may not be upholding the code:

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators: Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies Section 10-145d-400a

**(b) Responsibility to the Student:**

(1) The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:

(A) Recognize, respect and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal justly and considerately with students;

(C) Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientations.

**(c) Responsibility to the Profession:**

(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession of teaching, shall:

(D) Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.

- D’s reason for refusing to remove his hat was never probed or considered by Mr. G. Had he asked why D didn’t want to remove his hat, he would have learned that D’s father had given him a bad haircut and he was embarrassed. Mr. G may have implicit biases that caused him to behave differently toward D than he did toward M. We don’t know the name or the race of the student. Do you think it would matter if the student was a White male? Would he have been referred for discipline? A Black or Hispanic/Latino male?

*National and Connecticut discipline data tell us that Black and Hispanic/Latino students are punished more often and more harshly than their White peers for the same offense. Educational research confirms that Black and Hispanic/Latino students do not misbehave more than their*



*White peers*—so what do you think accounts for irrefutable racial disparities in student discipline sanctions?

- Mr. G is not “[recognizing], respect[ing] and uphold[ing] the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal[ing] justly and considerately with all students—regardless of race, ethnicity, color, gender.” If the facts are that Mr. G let a M keep her hat on then some students are perceived by their teacher to be less equal--why? Gender? Race? Bias? Racism? D may have felt embarrassed in front of his classmates. Mr. G’s rule does not allow for any digression.
- Mr. G’s professional judgment may be in question because he confronted D in front of the whole class and allowed the incident to escalate, losing valuable class time doing so.
- Mr. G may have implicit biases that influenced how he exercised his discretion and that was unfair and detrimental to the student’s self-worth and dignity.

**3. In this situation, how might the teacher’s decisions impact the teacher, the student, and the classroom, families, and school community?**

- Sending D to the principal’s office worsened the situation. Black or Hispanic/Latino students are suspended and expelled three times more often than white students. Sending D to the office may result in suspension and a loss of trust on D's part --which was caused by Mr. G's inconsistently enforcing his own rule. As a result, D may be subjected to more scrutiny by Mr. G who has demonstrated bias against him.

***Research:** National and state data is irrefutable that Black children do not misbehave more than White children but are universally punished more often, and with harsher sanctions for the same offense resulting in more classroom and school pushout, and increased likelihood of contact with police and/or the judicial system.*

*For students, unfair and/or racially disparate discipline can be traumatizing. Being pushed out of class and school by educators and administrators who are punitive rather than equitable and humane in their discipline practices, makes classrooms and schools unwelcoming, uncaring, unsafe spaces. Unfair discipline practices may result in student disengagement from school which can increase the likelihood that they will not return to school.*

- When teachers do not interact respectfully with all students, it results in a loss of trust and respect necessary to form a connection between the teacher and students.

**4. What responses/actions would result in a more positive outcome(s) and/or what can the teacher do to rectify this situation?**

- Mr. G could have taken D aside, away from the attention of the entire class, and asked him why he didn’t want to take his hat off. If he had, he would have learned that D’s



father gave him a bad haircut and he felt self-conscious and afraid the other students would make fun of him. But neither Mr. G nor the principal asked him why he had a hat on. He did not volunteer the information about the haircut because he didn't think the reason mattered to either of them since they had already labeled him insubordinate.

- Mr. G could focus on seeing all students as human beings; as children and adolescents who are trying to find their way and their place in a world that does not always give them grace to do it. He can spend some time getting to know his students to support a trusting, caring, and respectful relationship with them. If he had compassion for his students, and connection to all of his students—particularly D—Mr. G he may have had a different attitude about and approach to the situation.
- Mr. G should examine his own personal attitudes and beliefs. Is he fairly implementing his no hat policy? Is his policy punitive? Is the goal strict compliance? *Research shows that given the racial disparities in school discipline, zero tolerance policies most often negatively impact Black and Brown students and have contributed greatly to the expansion and maintenance of a school to prison pipeline for Black and Brown students.*

**Please note:** many schools adopt zero-tolerance policies for a wide variety of topics, including but not limited to vaping or drug possessions. These policies are often intended to protect the safety and well-being of students. This scenario is not intended to challenge zero-tolerance policies, but to call attention to how teachers fairly implement discipline policies in their classrooms.

**5. What are some classroom management strategies a teacher could employ to address a situation such as this? How can teachers, maintain appropriate standards of behavior, while being culturally responsive to their individual students?**

- Mr. G could work with students to develop a fair system of classroom rules that all students agree with. Asking students to participate is a good way to give students' voice. Creating rules with your students helps establish a learning environment built on mutual respect and affirmation (Bicard, 2000).
- Classroom management strategies should be simple, compassionate, and caring, not punitive. They should promote a classroom that is inclusive, welcoming, and mentally, physically, intellectually, racially, linguistically, and culturally safe.
- In classrooms where students are engaged, stimulated, valued and respected, behavior issues are less likely.
- Does Mr. G view his students with a deficit and/or punitive lens? Teachers should be willing to engage in self-reflection about their practice, and the culture and climate they establish.



- As classrooms become more diverse, teachers have to humanize students, prioritizing authentic connections that honor and respect students from various cultures and backgrounds. Teachers need to be affirming and culturally responsive to all students. Culturally responsive classroom management means building good teacher-student relationships that respect all students' backgrounds.
- Mr. G could meet students at the door and welcome them as they enter the classroom. He could then privately address the hat issue with D as he entered the classroom. This would have spared D the embarrassment of being called out in front of the whole class. D would have had an opportunity to explain why he didn't want to take off his hat.
- Setting high expectations for behavior is good practice, but it is also important to adopt an instructional approach to discipline in a way that is fair and that preserves students' dignity.
- Try seeing things from the student's point of view. Consider how you would respond if you were in the same position. Ask yourself, what factors might contribute to how a student is acting in a particular setting or situation? Using an approach such as this can help to de-escalate a situation and help teachers build better relationships with students.

## CONTEXT FOR SCENARIO 2

### *Names matter*

Names have meaning. Our names tell a unique story about who we are and where we come from. Correctly pronouncing, spelling, and respecting a student's name affirms the student's identity. When teachers mispronounce a student's name or make fun of it, it can have a lasting impact on the student's success, both within and outside the classroom. Culturally responsive educators know how important it is to respect their students' diverse cultures which includes respecting their names. Students who come from different backgrounds may have names that are not common.

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### **Scenario 2**

Ms. P teaches grade 6. She was taking attendance at the start of the day when a new student came into the classroom. Ms. P showed the young girl where to place her coat and belongings and instructed her to take a seat. She then asked the girl her name. The young girl replied in a soft voice, Chardonnay. The teacher looked bewildered and asked the girl to repeat her name. Thinking the teacher didn't hear her the first time, the student repeated her name a little louder "My name is Chardonnay." The teacher looked up and began to laugh. She then said, offhandedly and in disbelief, "like the wine? I know what your parent must have been doing!" All of the students in the classroom also laughed. Chardonnay blushed, looked down at the floor, and moved quietly to her seat.

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### Discussion Questions to Consider

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?
2. Which sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers and/or other school or district policies are applicable to this scenario?
3. In this situation, how might the teacher's decisions impact the students, families, the teacher, and the school community?
4. What responses/actions would result in a more positive outcome(s) and/or what can the teacher do to rectify this situation?

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators:  
Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies Section 10-145d-400a

**(b) Responsibility to the Student:**

(1) The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:

(A) Recognize, respect, and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal justly and considerately with students;

(C) Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientations.

**(c) Responsibility to the Profession:**

(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession of teaching, shall:

(D) Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.

**UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

(f) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:

(D) Emotionally abuse students.

**Possible Responses to Discussion Questions**

1. Identify the issues/concerns might this scenario raise?

- An adult who is a teacher has embarrassed a child/student with behavior that signals to the student and the other children in the class that there is something funny or odd about the student's name.
- The teacher has not created a safe or respectful space for this student.
- Ms. P did not uphold the dignity or worth of Chardonnay when she openly disparaged her name. Additionally, the teacher's behavior signaled to the students in the classroom that it is permissible to ridicule an aspect of a person—like their name.
- Being a new student, this is her first impression of her new school, teacher, and classmates. Chardonnay was not welcomed or made to feel like this teacher's class will be a place where she will be valued, treated with respect, and appreciated for who she is. The teacher has not created a classroom climate for Chardonnay that sets her up for a positive school year. The teacher has not created a classroom climate that encourages other students to be accepting and welcoming to new students, or



students who have names or attributes that may be different from all the other students in the class. A result might be that the other students tease or bully Chardonney about her name and other things that might make her seem different from them. The effect would be that Chardonney is reluctant to attend school because no one has made any effort to foster a positive connection with her. Or she may attend school but become shy and withdrawn for fear of other adults and children making fun of her.

- **Teacher's actions and words have consequences. The consequences can be long-lasting for this student. As an adolescent in middle school, students are trying to** figure out who they are, and understand their place in the world. Trusting, affirming, respectful teacher-student relationships support a student's ability to feel safe, to explore and exist in the world in a way that fuels their genius and their dreams.

**2. Which sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers and/or other school or district policies are applicable to this scenario?**

- Ms. P has failed to recognize, respect, and uphold the dignity and worth of Chardonney as an individual human being and has not treated her considerately. As a result, the student is left feeling embarrassed and unwelcome.
- Ms. P's comments may reflect a racial bias or stereotype. Judging a student based on race, ethnic origin or social class is a violation of the code of professional responsibility.
- The teachers' professional judgment was poor. Her comment was hurtful and disrespectful to the student.

**3. In this situation, how might the teacher's decisions impact the students, families, the teacher, and the school community?**

- Ms. P has failed to establish a good, trusting relationship with Chardonney. As a result, it may be impossible to build a positive relationship with the student. A good teacher-student relationship starts with the student's name. Culturally responsive educators know how important it is to respect their students' diverse cultures which includes respecting their names. Students who come from different backgrounds may have names that are not common. Reacting to a name as Ms. P did establishes a culture and climate that is dehumanizing and oppressive for some or all of the students in the class.
- Parents may perceive Ms. P as unfit to teach 6th graders.
- Her principal may write her up, which will go into her personnel records. If she has a pattern of saying or doing inappropriate things, her career may be in jeopardy. She could lose her job, be suspended without pay, and depending on the degree of her behavior, she could lose her certification.
- While students may laugh at the moment, they may also lose respect for their teacher. If Ms. P makes such comments on a regular basis, students may fear that they may be the subject of one of her comments. The teacher-student relationship may erode over time and Ms. P may face challenges managing her class.



- The school community may be concerned about their children having Ms. P as a teacher. Parents may request that their child not be placed in Ms. P's class.

**4. What responses/actions would result in a more positive outcome(s) and/or what can the teacher do to rectify this situation?**

- Ms. P could have said nothing about the student's name. Instead, she could have said, "Chardonnay that is a pretty name." She should have made Chardonnay feel welcome and demonstrate respect for the student and her name.
- Her very public disparagement of her student as reflected in her laughter and her question "like the wine?" can have a lasting negative impact on Chardonnay and make any positive teacher-student relationship impossible because Ms. P did not make Chardonnay feel that the classroom is a safe space for all children.
- Ms. P should apologize to Chardonnay in front of the class, state that she provided a very poor example of how to greet and welcome a new student. She needs to let them know that it was inappropriate for her to make such a comment, and she can demonstrate that by asking Chardonnay if they can begin again. Then she should model what should have been a better way to greet and invite Chardonnay into the class.

## CONTEXT FOR SCENARIO 3

“There’s evidence that when children have a strong, positive racial identity, they’re more academically and socially successful,” says Ali Michael, director of K–12 Consulting and Professional Development at the Center for the Study of Race & Equity in Education at the University of Pennsylvania and author of *Raising Race Questions: Whiteness, Inquiry and Education*.

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### Scenario 3

Ms. R is a 4th-grade teacher. It is early December, and Ms. R has brought in books about Christmas and put up some holiday decorations in her classroom for the season. One poster showed different holiday celebrations around the world. Most of the other decorations in the classroom are Christmas-related. She also created several worksheets with "fun" Christmas themes.

She loves to tell her students how much she loves Christmas and talks about her own family traditions.

In her class, there are four students from Vietnam, one Russian student, eleven African American students, one student from Ethiopia, and two from India.

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### Discussion Questions to Consider

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?
2. Which sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers and/or other school or district policies are applicable to this scenario?
3. In this situation, how might the teacher’s decisions impact the students, families, the teacher, and the school community?
4. What responses/actions would result in a more positive outcome(s) and/or what can the teacher do to rectify this situation?

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers:  
Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies Section 10-145d-400

**(b) Responsibility to the Student:**

**(1) The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:**

- (A) Recognize, respect, and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal justly and considerately with students;**
- (C) Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientations.**

**(c) Responsibility to the Profession:**

**(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession of teaching, shall:**

- (D) Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.**

**(e) Responsibility to the Community:**

**(1) The professional educator in full recognition of the public trust vested in the profession, shall:**

- (B) Endeavor to secure equal educational opportunities for all children.**

**Possible Responses to Discussion Questions**

**1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?**

- Although Ms. R hung up a single poster about different holidays, she has not invited her students to share their own family traditions. Instead, she has emphasized the importance of her traditions. Rather than take the time to learn about and affirm the holiday traditions of all of her students she chose to center and promote her own Christmas stories. In our society, it's common for people either to hold cultural biases or to fail to acknowledge the differences in cultures around us. While she may love her own traditions and want to share them with her students, she has not recognized, made space for, or affirmed the experiences and traditions of her students.
- Because Ms. R's lessons were not inclusive and reflective of the experiences, traditions, and faiths of her students and families, students from different cultures may feel unseen, uncomfortable, and unsafe. Some students may feel pressured to disavow themselves of their cultural beliefs and norms in order to assimilate into the majority culture. In this particular situation, students may feel that the clear message is that Christmas is the norm. This may reinforce societal standards, practices, and expectations that create racial stress and trauma and can interfere with their emotional and cognitive development resulting in school failure (Sheets, 1999). Relating competence in an urban classroom to ethnic identity development in R. Sheets (Ed.), Racial and ethnic identity in

school practices: Aspects of human development. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Ms. R is missing a valuable opportunity to ask questions and be open to hearing stories from her students about their own holiday traditions. This is a perfect opportunity for students to teach one another something, in turn! You cannot become culturally competent if you don't learn about other cultures or about one another.

**ASK PARTICIPANTS:** This was obviously a diverse class of students, but would the concerns be different if the students were all white?

- Being culturally responsive does not only apply to students who come from diverse backgrounds. **Every** student comes with their own cultural background. While students and the teacher may share similar holiday traditions, how much richer would the discussions be if all students had the chance to share their own family traditions and cultures. Students would feel that they were valued and their own stories were appreciated. It would be an opportunity to teach students that everyone is unique in their own way.

**2. What sections of the “Code” and/or other school or district policies are applicable to this situation?**

- By failing to recognize and embrace the different cultural traditions of her students, Ms. R is not recognizing, respecting, or upholding the dignity and worth of each individual student.
- Ms. R’s behavior may appear that she is not nurturing in her students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientations.
- Her actions ignore the various cultures of her students. While she may think she is recognizing them with the one poster in the room, she has not provided them with opportunities to share their own cultural traditions. She is not providing an equal educational opportunities to her students.
- Inviting students to share their own stories, incorporating the various cultures into her lessons would enrich her lessons and provide all of her student with a broader sense of one another and the world we live in.

**3. In this situation, how might the teacher’s decisions impact the teacher, the student, families, the classroom, and the school community?**

- Her students’ families may feel that their family's religious and/or cultural customs and beliefs are not welcomed or respected, especially when students bring home the Christmas-themed worksheets. The Christmas-themed worksheets may create an unequal opportunity for students because the content may be unfamiliar to them.
- Ms. R might be perceived as biased and culturally unaware. It could also reflect negatively on the school, creating the wrong impression.



- Students may be less engaged in the lessons because they do not have prior experiences to draw upon.
- The class may feel that Ms. R does not respect their diverse backgrounds. This can lead to a lack of trust because students and families may interpret her actions as disrespectful and indifferent to their families' heritage. They may feel that she does not value their cultures and are less likely to feel safe in her classroom.

**4. What should the teacher have done differently? What can the teacher do to rectify this situation?**

- Ms. R should have created classroom space and lessons which were inclusive and reflective of the experiences and faiths of her students and families.
- The practice of co-creating with students hears and honors their experiences, ideas, and insights. It recognizes and respects students as assets.

*In the book Dreamkeepers author and researcher Gloria Ladson-Billings identifies and discusses the three dimensions of culturally relevant teaching. Culturally relevant teachers are aware and thoughtful about how they show up in spaces; demonstrate and strive for connectedness with students and families; and cultivate a community of learners based on the premise that knowledge should be two-way sharing that values diversity and difference by taking them into account. Children process content more effectively when their cultures and languages have places in the curriculum. Ms. R should have integrated the various traditions from all of the diverse cultures in her classroom.*

- Ms. R should celebrate the rich cultures in her class. She needs to develop a learning environment that is relevant to and reflective of her students' social, cultural, and linguistic experiences. The environment should acknowledge, recognize, and celebrate all of her students regardless of their background. She could have asked her students to share their backgrounds by creating their own posters or projects reflecting their heritage and customs. She could invite families to share their traditions with the entire class.
- Being able to recognize cultural differences not only helps to form a safe and comfortable environment for open communication between the teacher and, her students and their families, but it will also help her to implement culturally responsive teaching practices in the classroom to ensure every student learns to their fullest potential.

# CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers

Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies Section 10-145d-400a

### (a) PREAMBLE

The Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers is a set of principles that the teaching profession expects its members to honor and follow. These principles set forth, on behalf of the teaching profession and the public it serves, standards to guide conduct and the judicious appraisal of conduct in situations that have professional and ethical implications. The Code adheres to the fundamental belief that the student is the foremost reason for the existence of the profession.

The teaching profession is vested by the public with a trust and responsibility requiring the highest ideals of professionalism. Therefore, the teacher accepts both the public trust and the responsibility to practice the profession according to the highest possible degree of ethical conduct and standards. Such responsibilities include the commitment to the students, the teaching profession, and the community.

Consistent with applicable law, the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers shall serve as a basis for decisions on issues pertaining to licensure and employment. It shall apply to all teachers licensed by or individuals seeking licensure from the State of Connecticut. For the purposes of this section, "teacher" means a person who is applying for, who holds, or who is employed under a teaching certificate, or other equivalent certificate, issued by the state board of education.

### (b) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT

1. **The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:**
  - (A) Recognize, respect, and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal justly and considerately with students;
  - (B) Engage students in the pursuit of truth, knowledge, and wisdom and provide access to all points of view without deliberate distortion of subject matter;
  - (C) Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientation;
  - (D) Foster in students the full understanding, application, and preservation of democratic principles and processes;
  - (E) Guide students to acquire the requisite skills and understanding for participatory citizenship and to realize their obligation to be worthy and contributing members of society;
  - (F) Assist students in the formulation of value systems and worthy, positive goals;
  - (G) Promote the right and freedom of students to learn, explore ideas, develop learning skills and acquire the necessary knowledge to achieve their full potential;



- (H) Strive to develop within students fundamental critical thinking skills and problem-solving techniques;
- (I) Remain steadfast in guaranteeing equal opportunity for quality education for all children, and not unlawfully discriminate; and
- (J) Maintain the confidentiality of all information concerning students obtained in the proper course of the educational process, and dispense such information only when prescribed or directed by federal or state law or professional practice.

**2. The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:**

- (A) Abuse his or her position as a professional with students for private advantage;
- (B) Sexually or physically harass or abuse students;
- (C) Emotionally abuse students; or
- (D) Engage in any misconduct which would put students at risk.

**c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION**

**1. The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession of teaching, shall:**

- (A) Conduct himself or herself as a professional realizing that his or her action reflects directly upon the status and substance of the profession;
- (B) Uphold the professional teacher's right to teach effectively;
- (C) Uphold the principle of academic freedom;
- (D) Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment;
- (E) Assume responsibility for his or her professional development;
- (F) Encourage the participation of teachers in the process of educational decision-making;
- (G) Promote the employment of only qualified and fully licensed teachers;
- (H) Encourage promising, qualified, and competent individuals to enter the profession;
- (I) Decline any gratuity, gift, or favor that would impair or influence professional decisions or actions; and
- (J) Maintain the confidentiality of all information concerning colleagues obtained in the proper course of the educational process, and dispense such information only when prescribed or directed by federal or state law or professional practice.

**2. The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession of teaching, shall not:**

- (A) Obtain licensure or employment by misrepresentation or fraud;
- (B) Misrepresent his, hers or another's professional qualifications or competencies; or
- (C) Engage in any misconduct which would impair his or her ability to teach.

**(d) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE COMMUNITY**

**1. The professional teacher, in full recognition of the public trust vested in the teaching profession, shall:**

- (A) Be cognizant of the influence of teachers upon the community-at-large, and, therefore, shall not knowingly misrepresent facts or make false statements;
- (B) Encourage the community to exercise its responsibility to be involved in the formulation of educational policy;
- (C) Promote the principles and ideals of democratic citizenship; and
- (D) Endeavor to secure equal educational opportunities for all children.



2. **The professional teacher, in full recognition of the public trust vested in the teaching profession, shall not:**
  - (A) Exploit the educational institution for personal gain; or
  - (B) Be convicted in a court of law of a crime involving moral turpitude or of any crime of such nature that violates such public trust.